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AUTHOR Natriello, Gary; Cohn, Marilyn
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ABSTRACT

The development of a merit pay system in effect since 1953 in a suburban school district is discussed in light of district records and interviews with administrators and teachers. A key element of the system is a standing committee for evaluation of the program, consisting of the superintendent, teacher-elected representatives, and one administrator elected by principals. The operation of the program is described in terms of Dornbusch and Scott's model of evaluation and authority in organizations, which posits six stages of activity in the evaluation process--task assignment, criteria setting, sampling, appraisal, feedback, and planning for improvement. Changes in the system in response to such forces as legal decisions, increased knowledge of effective teaching, and pressure from teachers for refined evaluation criteria have generally resulted in better articulated evaluation procedures. Ten district elementary school teachers interviewed all favored the merit system over evaluation and pay programs, citing as its strengths monetary reward for superior performance, a climate of professionalism, and improved instruction. The teachers perceived subjectivity in evaluations, ambiguity of feedback, and resulting morale problems as weaknesses of the program. Further study of this system is in progress. (MJL)

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Beyond Sanctions: The Evolution of a Merit Pay System

Gary Natriello and Marilyn Cohn

Washington University

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Beyond Sanctions: The Evolution of a Merit Pay System

The recent movement to consider merit pay systems for teachers (Burke, 1982) is but the latest in a series of such movements in educational research and policy making. If it follows the pattern of earlier movements, it should have at least three phases. First, there will be a period where merit pay is presented as the answer to one or more problems currently besetting the schools. This will be followed by some experimentation with merit pay in districts where it has never been tried before. During this period proponents and opponents will argue the merits of merit in the journals. In a third and final period, researchers and policy makers will observe merit pay experiments and decide that perhaps they create more problems than they solve. All of this will take place in the space of a few years as researchers and practitioners move on to examine yet another solution to the problems of the schools.

Although this cycle of discussion, experimentation, and dismissal is not unique in policy making (Downs, 1972), it leaves many questions about the potential of a number of policy options that are never fully tested and assessed. Such questions are particularly salient in the case of complex initiatives such as merit pay which involve changes in both the structural and the dynamic aspects of educational organizations. Because of the cyclical nature of interest in merit pay for teachers there are no accounts of the long-term impact and development of such systems. The present analysis is designed to fill this gap in the literature.

The Lawnview Merit Pay Program

In 1953 the district of Lawnview initiated a "Teacher Evaluation and Salary Program." Lawnview, a small wealthy district in the suburbs of a

major metropolitan area in the midwest, is not typical of American school districts in terms of size or socio-economic status of the community. Still, following the development of a merit pay system for teachers over a period of thirty years is a rare opportunity that will provide some sense of the pitfalls and potential of such systems.

The Lawnview program grew out of the cycle of interest in merit pay that occurred in the early 1950's and out of the interest of the superintendent of schools in finding a better way to compensate teachers. The superintendent argued that "When you get a crackerjack teacher, it's a shame she has to leave teaching to make a decent salary."

A key element in the program from its inception has been the Committee on Evaluation. The program description mandates that "A standing committee on teacher evaluation shall be established whose duties shall be to a) maintain a continuous evaluation of the program, and b) recommend desirable changes." (Report, 1976) This committee consists of the superintendent, building representatives elected by the teaching staff in each building, (one from each elementary school and two from each secondary school), and one representative from the administrative staff elected by the principals.

Data for this chronology of developments in the Lawnview merit pay system come from three sources. First, a variety of records kept by the district and by the Evaluation Committee were examined to determine the official changes made in the system. Second, interviews with key administrators at the central office and building level were conducted to assist with interpretatons of the changes. Third, structured interviews were conducted with a small number of teachers in the district to permit an initial determination of the impact of the program on teachers. It should be noted at the outset that the examination of merit pay in the Lawnview

district is on-going. This report represents an initial attempt to understand the history of the system.

A Model of Evaluation and Authority in Organizations

The analysis of the Lawnview "Teacher Evaluation and Salary Program" will be guided by the theory of evaluation and authority in organizations developed by Dornbusch and Scott (1975) and applied to the evaluation of teachers by Natriello and Dornbusch (1981). Their model contains six categories of activity related to the evaluation process. The stages are distinguishable in that in some organizations each stage of activity is performed by individuals in different positions in the authority system. The model thus provides us with a framework to orient our analysis of changes to the system.

The first stage of the model, task assignment, refers to the process by which performers are acquainted with the tasks associated with their position. The second stage, criteria setting, concerns the process by which performers are informed of those aspects of their tasks that are most important and the standards by which performance will be judged. The third stage, sampling, involves the collection of information about the actual performance and outcomes of the task. Assessment, the fourth stage, refers to the process by which evaluators compare the information collected during the sampling stage with the criteria and standards determined in the criteria setting stage to arrive at an evaluation. The fifth stage, feedback, involves both the communication of information regarding the evaluation and the distribution of sanctions such as salary to performers. Finally, the sixth stage, planning for improvement, refers to the process in which the supervisor and the performer work together to determine how

performance can be improved. These six stages of the evaluation process are depicted in Figure 1. They provide general categories to examine the evolution of the Lawnview merit pay sytem.

Insert Figure 1 About Here

Task Assignment

Lawnview has used a variety of methods to assign tasks to teachers over the years. Since the inception of the system every teacher has received an extensive teacher handbook. The handbook contains information on the district policies and procedures as well as a copy of the current report of the Commitee on the Teacher Evaluation and Salary Program. The handbook thus contains a thorough description of the personnel policies of the district, a description of teaching responsibilities, and a detailed description of the evaluation process. The teacher handbooks are collected during the summer and revised to reflect the latest information on the district and the evaluation and merit system.

In addition to the handbook, the Report of the Committee on the Teacher Evaluation and Salary Program, mandates that:

> Building meetings should be held by evaluators and/or evaluation committee representatives each year to discuss and review the evaluation plan, to correct any possible misinterpretations which might exist, and to clarify the procedures used in evaluation.

This part of the program grew out of the 1964 report of the Committee on the Teacher Evaluation and Salary Program which reviewed the results of a teacher opinion survey. That report concluded that "It is the responsibility of the evaluation committee member and the evaluator to meet with teachers to review the evaluation philosophy, criteria, and implementation." (Report, 1964)

In addition to the general meeting to discuss the evaluation and merit program, the program document mandates that a meeting be held with new faculty members and the building representative of the evaluation committee shortly after the first month of the school year. Administrators noted that with very few new teachers coming into the district in recent years, this meeting with new faculty has fallen by the wayside and has been replaced by conferences between evaluation committee members and individual teachers. A teacher hired in September 1981 told an interviewer that, "The building representative to the Evaluation Committee came around and told me what to expect and to include (in my evaluation file)." In addition to the orientation provided by the building representative to the Evaluation Committee, each new teacher is assigned a sponsoring teacher, and part of the sponsoring teacher's responsibility is to orient the new teacher and explain the system. Finally, in recent years the district has used detailed job descriptions throughout the hiring process, and prospective teachers are informed of the provisions of the merit pay plan early during the interviewing process.

Criteria Setting

In a number of ways the district is organized to clearly communicate to teachers their duties and responsibilities, their tasks as teachers in

the district. However, as Dornbusch and Scott (1975) point out, it is important that performers also know what aspects of their tasks are considered important for purposes of evaluation. They refer to this process as criteria setting. The criteria for teaching performance have received considerable and continuing attention since the inception of the merit pay program in 1953.

The original evaluation and salary program contained criteria for effective teaching that were organized under three broad headings: Personal Qualities of the Superior Teacher, Professional Training and Growth Leading to Superior Teaching, and Evidence of Superior Teaching. An excerpt from the section on Evidences of Superior Teaching reflects the tone of the original set of criteria:

> III. Evidences of Superior Teaching
>
> Individual pupil growth and development of harmonious relationships within the pupil group are the objectives and evidences of effectiveness of teaching. To judge this effectiveness, an evaluation should include more than achievement in factual materials, mastery of skills, and the degree to which pupil behavior approaches teacher-approved standards. It must recognize also social and emotional growth and adaptability. It should take into account the limitations placed upon individual teachers, but should give credit for resourcefulness in the use of materials and techniques.
>
> The effectiveness of teaching is evidenced by the degree to which:
>
> B. Learning situations are organized and objectives clarified so that pupils understand the purposes of a course or activity.
>
> This includes:
>
> 1. Teacher pre-planning
> 2. Planning with pupils
> 3. Relating activities to previous experiences
> 4. Relating present activities to future goals
> 5. Motivation
> 6. Capitalizing on classroom situations (Report, 1953)

In 1966 members of the Evaluation Committee suggested that the

criteria for teacher evaluation would be more helpful to both teachers and evaluators if they were written in behavioral terms. A sub-committee was appointed to re-state in behavioral terms several parts of the section of the criteria on Evidences of Superior Teaching. The report of this sub-committee, titled "The Resource Supplement to the Evaluation Criteria", was sent to the Evaluation Committee. After discussion and revision of the report in the full committee, another subcomittee was appointed to make final revisions. The final version was completed and distributed to all teachers and evaluators by the end of 1968. The Resource Supplement contained four major sections: Planning Instruction, Establishing Learning Activities, Providing Instructional Resources, and Evaluating Teaching Effectiveness Through Student Behavior. Excerpts from the section of the report describing its rationale and from the section on Planning Instruction illustrate the movement to more objective criteria for the evaluation of teaching.

Rationale:
Evidences of superior teaching as stated in the Lawnview Evaluation Criteria and Procedures booklet can be related to the observable behavior of both teacher and pupil. In order to more clearly determine the effectiveness of the teacher, it will be helpful to state explicitly that kind of behavior which will improve the teaching-learning act. The common identification by the teacher and the evaluator of the component parts of an instructional situation will also promote more effective communication among educators who use this common structure and vocabulary. The process of evaluation is conceived as a dual process, involving both the teacher and the evaluator. It is the intent of the supplement to stimulate this joint effort.

Planning Instruction

Truly effective teaching is an outgrowth of careful, conscious planning. The teacher, in planning, must articulate the content, the strategies, and the needs of the study. Hence, planning produces a set of internal directions subject to the constant re-definition demanded by the multiple interactions of the teaching-learning situation.

The effective teacher:

A. Locates and interprets information on how to write behavioral objectives.
B. Expresses objectives in terms of expected student performance.
C. Analyzes each stated objective with such questions as:
   1. Does the objective describe the educational intent clearly?
   2. Does the objective define the conditions for or limitations of the assignment?
   3. Does the objective describe what the learner will be doing?
   4. Does the objective define the criterion of acceptable performance?
D. Plans thoroughly enough so that each student knows what is expected of him/her.
E. Interprets the instructional objective to the student, taking into account his individual abilities and limitations.
F. Assists students in making a contribution toward reading the objectives.(Resource, 1968)

The Resource Supplement makes reference to the work of Bloom (1956), Gagne (1965), and Mager (1962) as it seeks to provide a more behaviorally oriented and objective treatment of criteria for teaching.

Another change in the criteria for evaluating teachers was made in 1979. At that time teachers in the secondary schools in the district who were engaged in extracurricular activities argued that they should receive additional compensation for this additional work. The Evaluation Committee made recommendations for changes that would permit this additional compensation, but these recommendations were not adopted by the Board of Education. The Board did, however, approve a stronger and more explicit emphasis on out-of-class activities in the evaluation process.

During the 1981-1982 school year the Administrative Council of the Lawnview District submitted to the Evaluation Committee a revised statement of the criteria for evaluating teachers. The Evaluation Committee studied, modified, and approved this revised statement. In this new version of the criteria the sections on Personal Qualities of the Superior Teacher, Professional Training and Growth Leading to Superior Teaching, and

Evidences of Superior Teaching were replaced with a five section statement of criteria: Effectiveness in Teacher/Student Interactions, Effectiveness in Relationships with Colleagues, Effectiveness in Contacts with Parents, Patrons, and Community, Effectiveness in Contributions to the Total School Program, and Effectiveness in Curriculum Development and Professional Improvement. The excerpts below illustrate the tenor of the new statement of criteria:

> I. Effectivness in Teacher/Student Interactions
>
> The teacher practices professionally most directly when bringing his or her knowledge, skills, and attitudes to bear on the growth and development of students. Effective teaching is characterized by a variety of behaviors which enhance the quality of student growth and development. The more proficient in these behaviors, the more effective the teacher. Their absence or deficiency contributes to ineffectiveness or inefficiency. The superior teacher excels in relationships with students; the satisfactory teacher meets the expected performance in relationships with students.
>
> A. The teacher's interactions with students reflect preplanning with attention to both individual and group needs.
>
> 1. The evidence of planning is identifiable.
> 2. There is evidence of short-range planning.
> 3. There is evidence of long-range planning.
> 4. There is evidence of planning to accomodate the needs of the special learner.

District administrators described the changes in the criteria for the evaluation of teaching over the years as a process of clarifying and explaining more precisely just what is expected of teachers. One administrator suggested that several factors had led to the revisions in the criteria. First, since the inception of the merit pay plan there has been considerable research on the characteristics of effective teaching. This research has resulted in a better sense of what it takes to be effective in the classroom. Second, outside pressures through the legal process have made it necessary for the district to be precise in defining

what is expected of a good teacher. Specifically, a teacher placed on leave by the district challenged the validity of the evaluation process as a mechanism for determining who should be let go from the teaching staff. Third, the most recent revision in the criteria initiated by the Administrative Council was motivated by the need to more precisely evaluate teachers in order to place them on the more finely discriminating salary schedule adopted by the Board of Education. All of these forces have led the district to move from criteria involving higher inference levels on the part of evaluators to criteria involving lower inference levels.

Sampling

Sampling refers to the process by which evaluators collect or select information related to teacher performance. In the Lawnview district a series of forms serves to orient and organize the sampling process. Form A contains a record of the teacher's "Basic Educational Training" including degrees received and courses taken. Form B contains a record of the teacher's "Teaching Experience". These are fairly straightforward and are reviewed and updated each year by the principal.

Form C is a record of "Significant Experiences, Organizations, and Services" in which the teacher was involved. It records the type of experience and the nature of the teacher's participation. One administrator pointed out that the teachers can control the content of Form C by adding information each time they are involved in a significant experience.

Form D is regarded as the most important by administrators and teachers alike. It is on this form that evaluators summarize the results of their observations and conferences with teachers. Unlike the forms used

in many districts, there are no checklists on Form D. Rather the evaluator simply summarizes the results of the observation and conference on a blank space on the form. Additional pages with comments may be attached by either the teacher or the evaluator.

Classroom observation is a major element in the sampling process and an element that has not changed significantly since the start of the program. The evaluation procedures manual places the observations in a context of furthering mutual understanding:

> It should be understood that classroom visitation is not for the sole purpose of evaluating the teacher. In order to develop mutual understanding and to assist and promote effectiveness of teaching, the evaluator must be familiar with classroom activities. (Report, 1982)

The recommended procedure for evaluating new teachers is to include a minimum of three visits each school year. During the past year the administrators have adopted a policy of making three formal observations of all teachers with one observation during the fall, another prior to the annual summative evaluation report in March, and a third after March. The observation after March is recognized as particularly important when teachers move from one supervisor to another so there is a record of their performance in the preceding spring. Formal observations of teaching have typically occurred less frequently.

Sampling goes beyond the formal observations and conferences. The evaluation procedures state that:

> An evaluation should be a continuous process rather than a periodic procedure and should call for constant appraisal of aims and techniques with recommendations for future progress. Self-evaluation is a vital part of this process. (Report, 1982)

A central district administrator explained to us that there is a fair

amount of diversity in the approaches principals take to the sampling process. Beyond the basic minimum requirements, "the principals can select their own approaches so long as at the end of the year there is a product." The central office administrators operate with the idea that "you don't have to tell them (the principals) how to do something, you just tell them what to do and let them go." As one administrator put it: "The system has great regard for the autonomous professional. It's okay to be out in left field, just stay in the ballpark...We encourage principals to be creative about the process of evaluation."

The leeway given the principals results in a number of approaches to the sampling problem. One principal makes it a practice of sitting down with every teacher at least every other week. Another principal explained how even seemingly unrelated things such as the amount of certain supplies used by a teacher, could be clues to the kind of work going on a particular classroom. Still other principals have experimented with a model of clinical supervision in which they provide the teachers with a complete narrative of what happened in the classroom during their observations.

Appraisal

Appraisal is the process by which the evaluators compare samples of teacher performance with the criteria previously set. Since appraisal takes place in the mind of the evaluator, it is often difficult to observe and understand. In Lawnview in recent years particular attention has been paid to the appraisal process. Central office administrators monitor the appraisal process by examining the summative evaluation reports prepared by the principals for each teacher. Earlier, it was noted that principals could devise their own strategies for evaluation above and beyond the

minimum requirement as long as there is a product of a certain quality at the end of the year. The end product is the summative evaluation report filed on each teacher.

The central office administrators examine the evaluations filed by the principals on each teacher in the district. Principals are then given feedback on how they performed the appraisal task. During an interview a central office administrator made it clear that this process was not to challenge the principals' judgements, but rather to critique and improve the method used to arrive at those judgements. In the past few years the principals have been urged to be specific in their comments on the summative evaluation form. They are instructed to identify the criteria involved and the source of the data (sample) used in arriving at an appraisal.

Two studies of the appraisal process as reflected in the summative evaluations have been conducted by members of the administrative team. The first involved a content analysis of a sample of evaluations of teachers during the years between 1964-65 and 1970-71. One conclusion of the study was that the evaluations were generally positive in tone, but offered "very little specific detail either on the source of evidence for the judgement or the specific criteria against which the evidence was weighted for judgement." (Shaughnessy, 1976) The second study involved a content analysis of evaluations of teachers from the years 1977-1978 through 1978-1979. This study found that progress had been made in anchoring the evaluative claims to the criteria and to sources of data. (Faulk, 1983) Apparently, efforts by administrators to relate appraisal more directly to the criteria setting and sampling processes have begun to have an impact.

Feedback

In a merit system two kinds of feedback may be given to performers. First, there is the information on the results of the performance evaluation itself. Second, there is the salary adjustment associated with the evaluation. Both types of feedback have undergone changes during the thirty years the system has been in place.

Information on performance has been communicated formally through the use of two forms during the thirty years the system has been in place. Form D is used to report to the teacher on the results of the formal classroom observation. As noted earlier, this form contains the open-ended comments of the evaluator. Form E is used to report the final summary evaluation for the evaluation cycle to the teacher. This form includes room for open-ended comments from the principal related to the categories of evaluation criteria and a section for recommendations. Under planned conditions, teachers would thus receive feedback on their performance four times each year, once after each of the formal observations and once after the summary evaluation has been made. In addition, the evaluation program provides that cumulative evaluation folders be maintained and available to teachers at all times. These folders should contain all of the completed evaluation forms on the individual teacher. (Forms A through E)

Administrators described the feedback currently given to teachers as more precise and more comprehensive than in the past. This change is attributed to the greater legal pressure on the district and to the fact that principals see each others feedback sheets and offer suggestions for improvements. This process of critiquing the feedback in the administrator's council means that principals know that the feedback they give to teachers will be more public than heretofore.

The salary plan attached to the evaluation system has changed several times over the thirty year period. The most dramatic change occurred in the 1979-1980 school year. Prior to that time the salary plan involved three levels of increment for each salary schedule. These levels provided teachers with annual increments of $600, $700, or $800 depending upon the evaluations of their performance. In addition, a $1000 "super increment" was given for unusually meritorious service.

District administrators reported that under this arrangement the maximum increments were almost always given to all teachers. Receiving less than the $800 increment was viewed as a penalty by the teachers. One administrator noted that part of the reason for the bunching of salary increments at the maximum was because the district has hired teachers likely to succeed in such a system and because performance has gotten better over the years. As he put it directly, "We don't believe that we have a cross-section of the U.S. teaching competence...and so we don't have a standard distribution" of increments.

In response to the bunching of salary awards at the top of the range, the Board of Education mandated changes in the system to spread the increments "up and out". A new system of increments was put into effect for the 1979-1980 school year. This system is depicted in Figure 2.

Insert Figure 2 About Here

The system is based on points awarded to teachers as a result of their evaluation by their principal. Teachers on Schedule I may receive from 0 to 9 points with an expected standard for good teaching of 5 points; those on Schedule II may receive from 0 to 11 points with an expected standard for good teaching of 7 points; and those on Schedule III may receive from 0 to 15 points with an expected standard for good teaching of 9 points. Teachers moving from Schedule I to Schedule II receive 10 points, while those moving from Schedule II to Schedule III receive 12 points. The current salary range for starting teachers with no experience is $12,800 to $13,200.

Each year the Board of Education sets a dollar value for each point. During the first year of operation of the new system each point was worth $100. In the following two years each point was worth $150. The net effect of the new system has been to increase the size of the increments and spread the actual increments awarded over a wider range. Under the old system most teachers received increments of $800, the maximum amount; under the new system most teachers receive nine points which have been worth from $900 to $1350.

Although most teachers receive larger monetary increments under the new system, the meaning of those increments is quite different. Several of the teachers interviewed told us that when they used to receive the maximum $800 increment, they felt satisfied. Now when they receive 9, 11, or even 13 points, they feel as if they are not measuring up and need somehow to do better. Several teachers also expressed frustration at not knowing how they could do any more to receive the maximum of 15 points.

As noted earlier, principals have felt the need to become more precise in their evaluations so as to make finer distinctions between teachers over

a greater range. One administrator reported that teachers occasionally interpreted this greater precision as "nit picking" on the part of the administrators. The feedback process, like the criteria setting, and sampling processes has become more refined over the years.

Planning for Improvement

Evidence on the process of planning for improvement can be seen chiefly through the recommendations principals make to teachers as a result of the evaluation process. A central office administrator who conducted a study of principal evaluations in the sixties characterized the recommendations made to teachers at that time as lacking in force and specificity. In part this can be attributed to the generally high evaluations and increments given most teachers at the time. In addition, a number of the principals noted that sensitive issues involving recommendations for improvement were often handled in conferences with teachers and never became part of the written record.

However, as the evaluations became more descriptive and precise and as administrators had to make finer distinctions between teachers for increments, the recommendations for improvement had to become more forceful and formal. One district administrator reported that, "As we refined our summative evaluations, we felt the need to distinguish between pleasant suggestions and real recommendations." Moreover, pressure from the legal world made it imperative to establish the continuity of the record legally.

The central office administrator in charge of reviewing the evaluations of all teachers in the district noted that almost every teacher in the system now gets at least 1 or 2 recommendations for improvement. Some teachers may get as many as 8 such recommendations, though such a

teacher would likely be in serious difficulty. The tone of the recommendations has shifted from "You might...." to "You should meet with me to discuss...."

One administrator noted three uses for recommendations. First, they are a way to bring people along with directions established at the building level. Second, they are used to promote professional growth. Third, they can be addressed to correct real problems such as unacceptable or unsafe procedures. In recent years, typical recommendations have included such things as urging teachers to read in some area, to take certain classes, to meet with other people on the building staff, and to meet to work with other administrators on certain problems.

Since the recommendations have become more directive, more specific, and more formal, they have been used in another way. Recommendations are often used to start the next year's evaluations. This is typically done by reviewing a teacher's progress in the areas in which they received recommendations for improvement during the past year. Thus the final stage in one evaluation cycle feeds into the initial stage of the next evaluation cycle.

Trends in the Evaluation and Merit System Over Thirty Years

In the thirty years since the start of the Lawnview Evaluation and Salary Program there have been a variety of changes. In general, these changes have resulted in evaluation procedures that are more well articulated now than at the start of the program. Each of the six stages of the evaluation process is now more precise, more formal, and more explicit. These changes are the result of both external and internal forces over the intervening thirty years.

The primary external forces for change have been the impact of legal decisions regarding the treatment of employees and the progress in the knowledge of the factors that make for effective teaching. Administrators reported increasing pressure to be able to defend their personnel decisions in court, particularly decisions regarding the termination of employment based on some merit rating. At the same time administrators and teachers alike became aware of the increasing body of knowledge relating aspects of teacher performance to student learning. These forces resulted in more behaviorally oriented criteria for the evaluation of teaching and related refinements in the sampling, appraisal, feedback, and improvement stages of the process.

Changes in the program have also come about as a result of forces from within the school district. The Committee on Evaluation has served as a channel for those working under the system to recommend changes to it. The initial action to refine the criteria came from teachers who wished to identify more specifically the elements of teaching for which they were to be held accountable. The increased emphasis on extracurricular activities was the result of the pressure from secondary teachers to receive extra compensation for extra duties. The latest revision and rationalization of the criteria was initiated by the administrators who felt that they needed the adjustment to adequately carry out their tasks as evaluators. One administrator suggested that one reason the system has endured is because it has adjusted to the demands and complaints of various groups in the district.

The systemic nature of the evaluation and merit process is highlighted by those occasions when a change in one stage of the process has subsequently required changes in other stages of the process. The clearest

example is the impact of the Board's decision to change the schedule of increments on the other stages of the evaluation process. When administrators were forced to make finer distinctions in the recommended salary increments for teachers, they found they had to make more refined appraisals of performance. Such refined appraisals required revised criteria and more careful attention to the source of their judgements in the samples of teaching performance. The finer distinctions in salary increments also forced administrators to provide more detailed feedback for teachers, and the fact that fewer teachers received the top increment made it necessary for administrators to consider more carefully the recommendations for improvement given to individual teachers.

The analysis of the trends in the system suggests that teachers aren't the only ones being held accountable by virtue of the merit system. Principals are held equally accountable. Not only are their evaluations of teachers closely evaluated by their administrative superiors, but since the evaluations substantially affect the salaries of teachers, the teachers also hold them accountable for justifying their evaluations. The outcome of such a system would seem to be a group of educators who are more cognizant of the educational process as they go about their daily tasks.

Teacher Perspectives on the Evaluation and Salary Program

Ten teachers at Stratford Elementary School talked to us at length in individual interviews ranging between one and two hours. They discussed the strengths and weaknesses of Lawnview's Merit Pay System. As a result of shrinking enrollments and efforts to economize, Stratford was, this year, the recipient of the staff and students of the closed Wentworth School, a few miles away. This move brings the number of grade level

teachers at Stratford up to nineteen and the support staff up to thirteen. Those interviewed represent every grade level and a variety of support staff positions with longetivity at both Stratford and Wentworth. Several had also tught in other elementary schools within and outside the Lawnview district. Their remarks then reflect, for the most part, their overall experience in the district as opposed to any single school or administrator.

Overall Assessment

The ten teachers interviewed were in total agreement on one key issue -- they all favor the merit system over other evaluation and salary programs. Both those who have only taught under the Lawnview system and those who have also taught under more conventional systems are convinced that life is better and more just under their current arrangement. Their overall positive assessment of the practice stands in considerable contrast to the perceptions of teachers outside the system. Teachers we have talked to in other studies have consistently endorsed the merit idea in principle but rejected it in practice. They are equally convinced that such a system cannot and will not be fairly administered. In their view, life under merit must inevitably be less just. One way to tap into the discrepancy between the ten who live under such a system and the general teaching public who do not is to look at some of the strengths and weaknesses of the Lawnview Merit Plan from the perspective of teachers.

<u>Strengths of the Program</u>

The monetary reward is, of course, mentioned most often as the system's major strength. One teacher told us, "Merit pay was the major

attraction of the job. I knew I would get rewarded for my effort." Another admitted, "I am enough of a capitalist to believe that the best people should be paid the most." Still another explained, "I don't think there is any place you can earn as much as I've earned in such a short time."

A second major strength, however, appears to be the sense of professionalism the system generates. Teachers frequently used the word "professionalism" to describe their work environment: "This is a professional staff"; "Here I'm treated as a professional"; "People are very professional regarding their salaries". While no one was terribly explicit as to what it means to be treated as a professional, in Lawnview it appears that at the most general level, the idea that one is in control of one's promotion or advancement is important. In addition, the words "freedom", "autonomy", and "communication" surface frequently. Under the current arrangement teachers feel that while the criteria for evaluation and guidelines for subject matter are specified, there is considerable freedom and autonomy as to decision making on pedagogy. One teacher put it this way: "It's a real plus in the system that the guidelines of the curriculum are not rigidly enforced. You make you own decisions. Another was more direct: "He (the principal) says, 'Just get it done' -- he doesn't care how." Moreover, there appear to be opportunities to communicate in terms of what will be evaluated, when and how. One can, for example, arrange to have the principal formally observe a particular lesson or simply invite him to pop in. One can select student work to show the principal or let him look on his own. One can also disagree with an evaluation and ask the principal to come in again. As one teacher put it: "If I can verbalize it and define it, I can usually win my point."

The issue of being "professional" regarding disclosure of salaries seems worthy of special note. All but one of the teachers interviewed seemed convinced that the system works primarily because of silence regarding what one earns. Some cite as cases in point the Lawnview junior and senior high schools where evaluations and salaries are openly discussed. According to Stratford teachers, many of the secondary school teachers are dissatisfied with merit pay; and the Stratford perception is that the salary talk engenders jealousy and divisiveness. One teacher summed up the prevailing sentiment in these terms: "Merit works here because it is not talked about -- even good friends don't talk -- evaluations are private -- I show mine to my mother and that's it!"

A third major strength from the teachers' perspective is that the system does, in fact, improve their instruction. One veteran of eleven years told us, "It keeps teachers on their toes -- they are more likely to think of new ideas -- Teachers don't crank out the same lessons they did twenty years ago -- It puts more vitality and uniqueness in instruction. A new (second year) teacher felt that the system helped her to develop and improve as well: "As a new teacher it makes me consider whether what I'm doing is effective -- It makes a difference to me that the principal is concerned with how I'm measuring up -- its like working for an 'A' in college."

Some teachers talk in terms of feeling more accountable for their instruction. According to one: "Teachers in other districts say 'you're brave' to be on the firing line all the time! We are conscious that what we do is going to matter to someone -- what we do is important to parents, kids, and administrators."

In addition to motivating them to improve and feel accountable for

their classroom performance, the merit system as it is implemented appears to provide direct assistance along the way. According to one teacher, "the evaluators are trained to look at your work." Another finds the principal helpful because "he keeps up on research -- he keeps me informed about developments in my field I don't know about." Yet another sees her principal as a "resource". As she explains it, "You can always ask for help." Moreover, "He can see the overall picture when you are looking only at your grade level." The principal is respected, by one for his "expertise" on students, by another for his "knowledge of curriculum" and by numerous others for simply knowing what's going on with every child. A teacher planning to retire this year reflects on her experience in this positive light: "Lawnview has given me an education that no college could give me." And such accountability and assistance appears to pay off. Stratford teachers believe instructional quality is high because the seniority system has been replaced by merit. As one put it, "merit keeps the best teachers."

Monetary reward for superior performance, a sense of professionalism and improved instruction -- from the perspective of ten elementary teachers in Lawnview, the merit system of evaluation and salary seems to be working. Yet these same teachers see serious weaknesses in the program as well.

Weaknesses of the Program

The most frequently mentioned weakness was exactly what one might expect -- "the inherent subjectivity of the evaluation process." Some teachers accuse the principal of having favorites; one who is reputed to be on the favored list, however, senses, "that the favorites are the one who do the best job." Others see problems around genuine differences between

principal and teacher as to what constitutes effective teaching. One teacher, for example, talks of "different views of maintaining control -- both different perspectives and different standards -- I know if he observes a lesson with more freedom and activity, I will get a lesser evaluation, and if he observes a quiet orderly lesson, I'll get a higher evaluation." Another worries a bit about "personality conflicts" and principals who "think the only way is his way." She has seen "merit" used "as a method of browbeating rather than up-grading" but admits that those instances have been "rare." Several believe that no matter how hard principals try to be fair and consistent, it is extremely hard to standardize the procedures because of the "individuality" of the evaluators and teachers. One teacher is less charitable. She labels the program a "paternalistic" system wherein "the principal is omnipotent."

Another major weakness of the system revolves around the criteria and the ways in which they are applied and communicated. There is, for example, considerable discontent on the question of extra-curricular activities. When the point system was established during the 1979-1980 school year, extracurricular duties and responsibilities were included. This is seen as unfair by a number of elementary teachers. One complaint is that elementary teachers simply don't have the opportunity to do as much outside of school as junior and senior high teachers. The feeling among some elementary teachers is, in fact, that the only way to obtain the highest rating is to be a coach. Another complains that one cannot participate in extracurricular activities without administrative assistance. As she explains it, "To increase merit when it is already very high one must serve on district committees. However, committees are appointed by the administrator and, therefore, it is hard to raise one's

own merit without district help. I wanted to be on a particular committee, and I had the experience, but I was not chosen." Still another teacher believes that extra work should be rewarded separately at the elementary level. "In other districts, sixth grade teachers get extra pay for camp. Here it is just expected. In most other professions, you would be rewarded for travel. Teachers work at home and coaches are expected to be at all kinds of events and work late hours and this is all part of the job here."

Another problematic issue related to the criteria is the ambiguity about what it takes to reach the top. Some feel it is impossible to figure out where the main focus will be. A Schedule III teacher teacher who consistently earns a "13" expresses the frustration: "I've asked the principal how he would be evaluating me -- more specifically what he's looking for. If you ask, he says go to the evaluation booklet. Well there are pages and pages there -- the only thing they will say is that your teaching performance counts the most -- I'm getting better but the merit stays the same -- I don't know what more I can do to improve. The highest rating seems unattainable." The problem of getting to the top, of course, has increased with the establishment of the point system and the wider spread. As one Schedule III teacher explained: "Before the point system, I used to get the highest. Now I get a "9", and its hard to find out what to do to get a '15'." Thus with page after page of criteria, a teacher can and does say: "We have to guess what is influencing merit."

This uncertainty suggests the possibility of a morale problem and several teachers explicitly acknowledged the presence of one. According to one teacher the point system has turned the evaluation process into "a business" and made teachers too money conscious. Some claim that teachers are too fearful to speak. One teacher maintains that teachers are not

frank because of the threat of retaliation through merit. Another simply perceives a generally unhealthy climate: "There is secrecy -- you don't know who is doing what -- some cut-throat tactics -- less sharing than in other systems -- an artificial competition." One teacher, however, contends the problem lies not with the system but with individuals. He explains that he has observed a willingness to share among some colleagues and fierce competitiveness among others.

Related to the issue of morale at Stratford is the perception that morale at the junior and senior high is so low that teachers "would throw merit out" if they could. Elementary teachers believe that merit pay is less successful at the secondary level for a host of reasons: differences in size, attitude, male/female ratio, and administrators. In addition, there is developing concern for the future of merit pay at all levels. Several teachers speak of a growing recognition that teachers in other districts are earning as much and that, in fact, teachers with masters degrees seem penalized under the system. Another worries that economically the system might be in jeopardy -- that there won't be enough money to make it continue to work. In her view school closings and mergers are presently putting additional pressures on the system, and county-wide desegregation efforts could also cause a number of new ripples.

Subjectivity, ambiguity, and consequent morale problems -- clearly the Lawnview Evaluation and Salary Program has some of the very failings outside critics attribute to such systems. Nonetheless, from the perspective of ten insiders at the elementary level, these negatives are far outweighed by the positives of monetary reward for performance, a climate of professionalism, and improved classroom instruction. Of course, in order to get a sharper picture of merit at Lawnview, we must talk to

many more teachers at every level of the system. Our initial look at the development of the system over time and these early interviews, however, have given us some new questions to pose and issues to pursue as we initiate our next round of data collection. For now, we can surely claim that the institution of merit pay systems in education involves a host of rather complicated issues beyond the simple imposition of sanctions.

A MODEL OF THE EVALUATION PROCESS

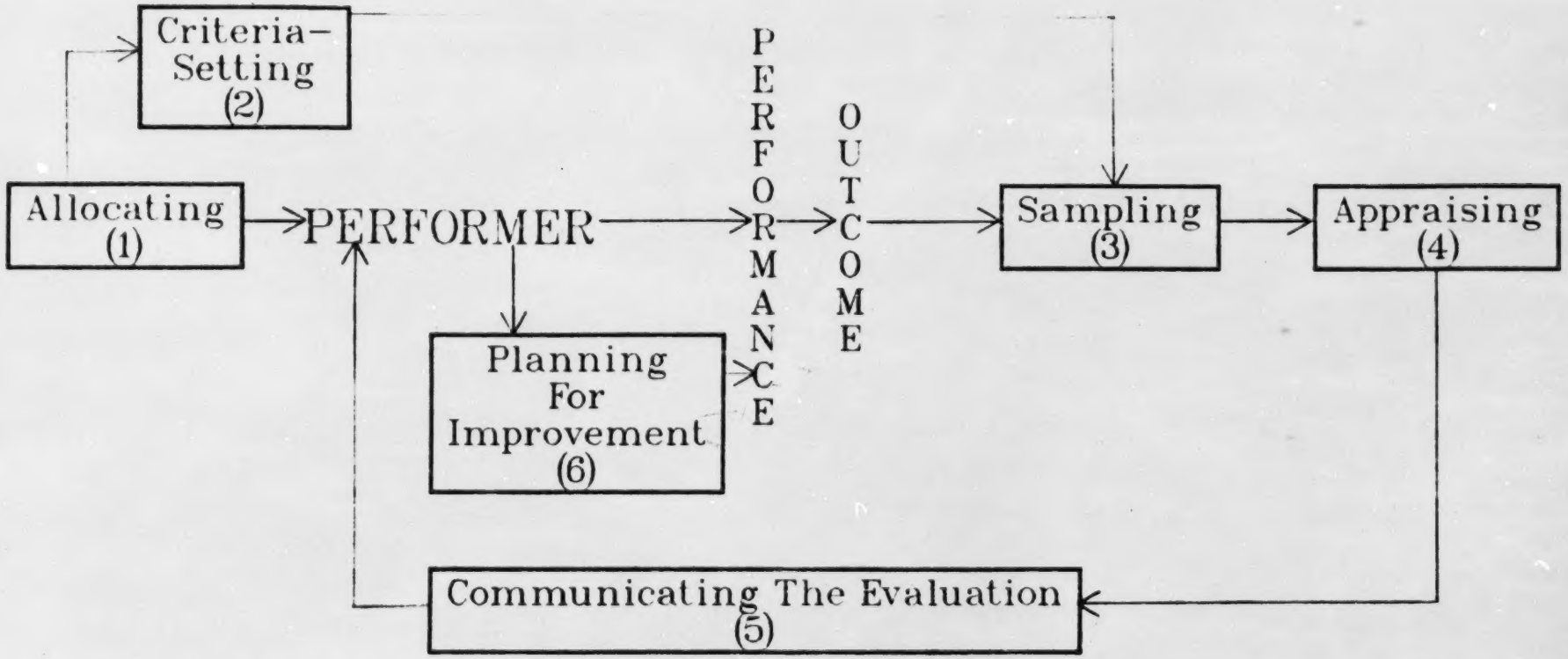

Figure 1

Schedules of Salaries

Schedule	Minimum	Points	Maximum
I	$12,800 - 13,200 (Determined by Courses Taken, Grades Received, Practice Teaching, Instructors' Recommendations, Interview and/or Observation, Out-of-School Experiences, Supply and Demand.)		
		0 - 3 - 5 - 7 - 9	Open
Incentive Increment when advanced to Schedule II		10 points	
II		0 - 3 - 5 - 7 - 9 - 11	Open
Incentive Increment when advanced to Schedule III		12 points	
III	0 - 3 - 5 - 7 - 9 - 11 - 13 - 15		Open

Figure 2

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